

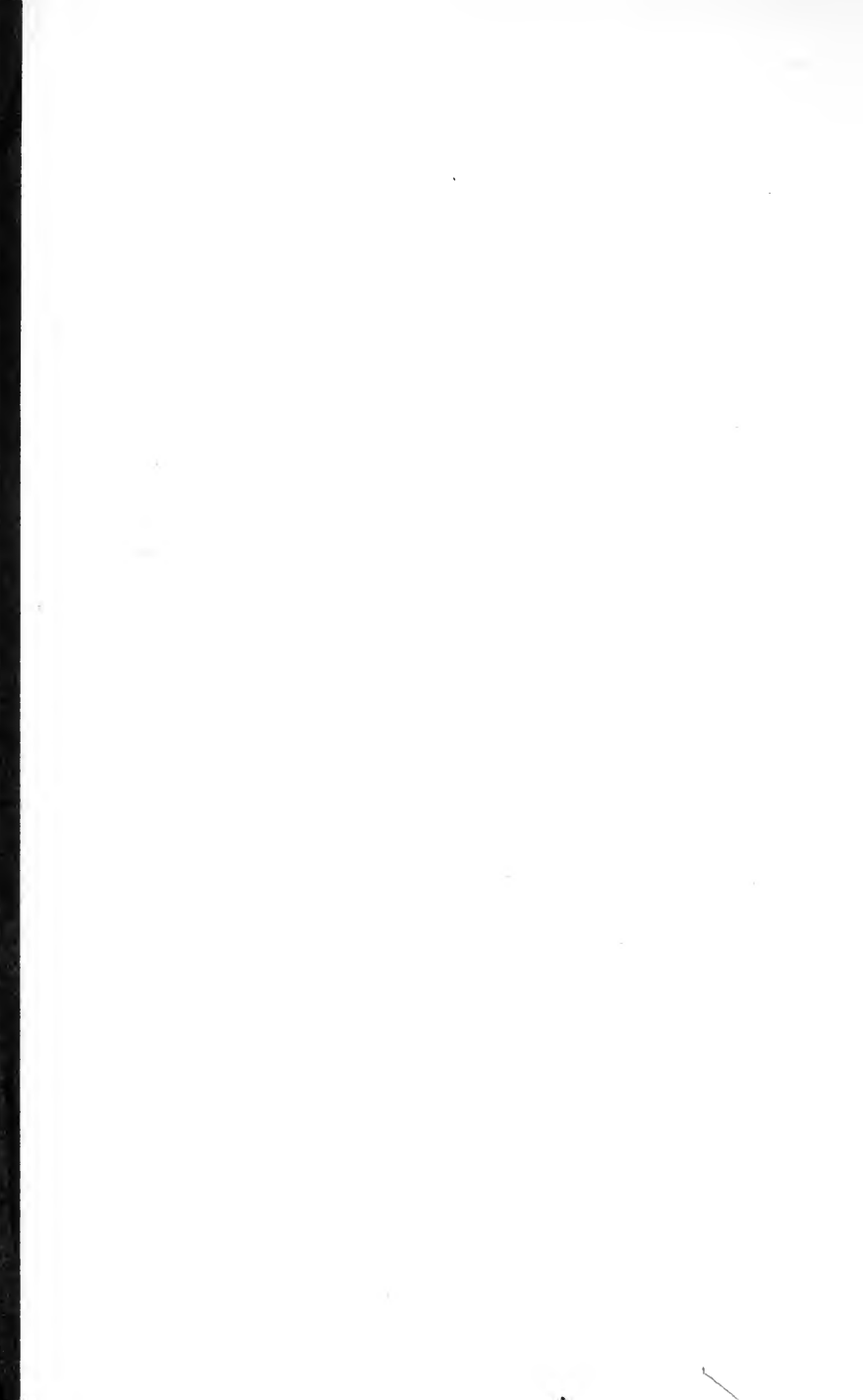
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BERNARD SHAW
OF
MODERN TYPOGRAPHY



BERNARD SHAW
ON
MODERN TYPOGRAPHY

REPRINTED FROM
THE CAXTON MAGAZINE
LONDON



HORACE CARR
AT THE PRINTING PRESS
CLEVELAND
1915

LOAN STACK

Z 246

S57

1915

MAIN

LOAN STACK

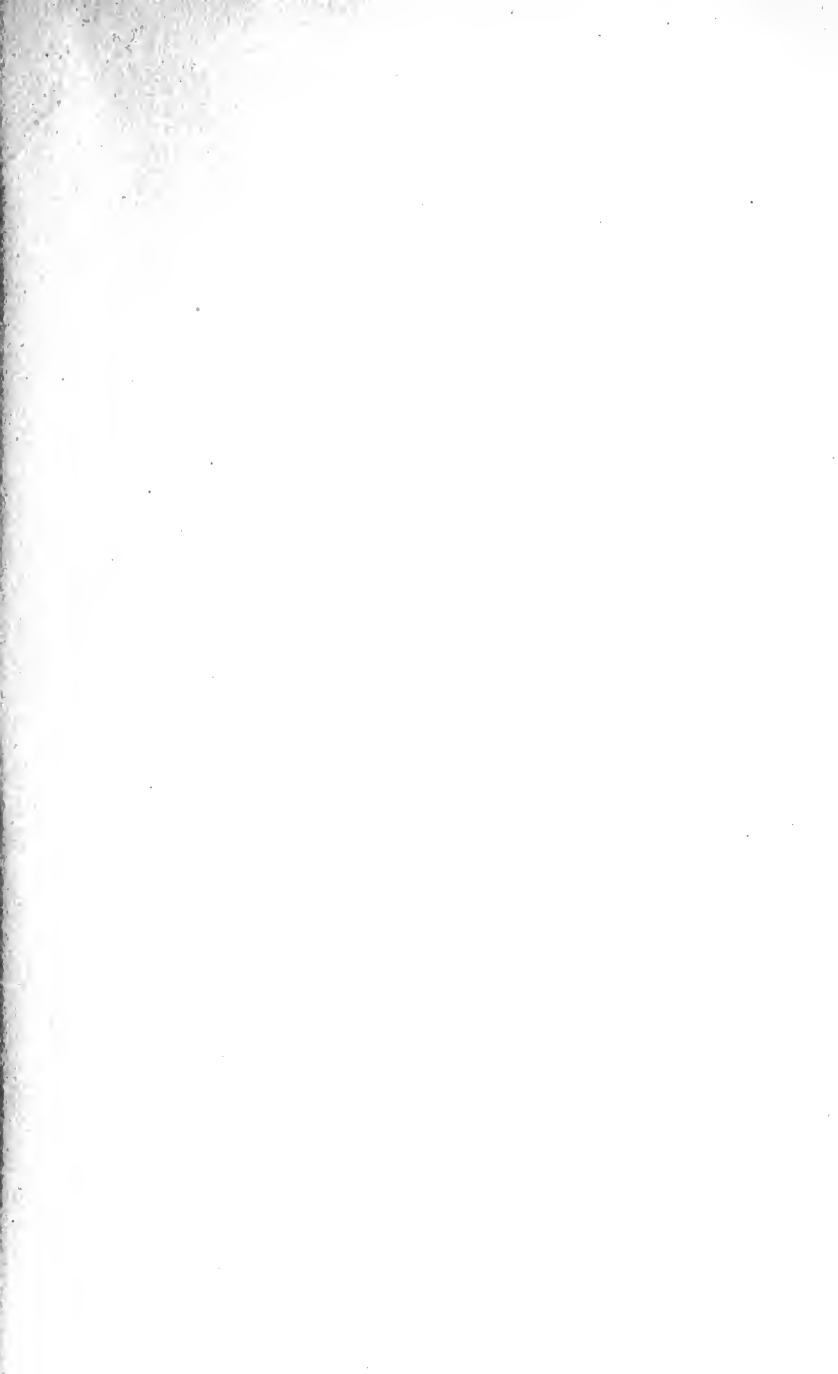


MODERN TYPOGRAPHY

Like most authors, I am so greatly indebted to the printer, and the printer's reader, for their work and help in the production of my books, that I cannot point out their shortcomings without feeling some stings of conscience for my ingratitude. Besides, an author is not a fair judge of a printer, because the author himself usually spoils the printer's work.

This arises from the fact that the main difference between a well-printed page and an ill-printed one lies in the evenness of the block of colour presented by the letterpress. If the justification is made solely to comply with some office rule against dividing words at the end of a line, or if the spaces between the sentences are made as long as possible, or if the page is leaded, and the type kept small, so as to make the white the chief feature instead of the black,





then no ingenuity of ornament, or gilt edging, or silky surface in one fashion, or affectation of Caslon type and deckle edged hand-made paper in another, will make the book look well. Not only will there be the transverse bars of white made by the leads, but rivers of white will trickle up and down between the words like rain-drops on a window pane; and the block of letterpress will be grey here and whitey-brown there, and mildewy in the other place, instead of a rich, even colour all over.

Now I think it cannot be denied that many fashionable books show that the printer has not only not known this first canon of his art, but that he has actually gone out of his way to introduce leads and spacings wherever he can. And even the most cultivated authors encourage him in this: for instance, Mr. Ruskin's books, as printed under his own supervision, are instructive examples of everything a book should not be. In the books of a great artist-printer like William Morris, you will find that not only did he discard leading and make it an invariable rule to set his type solid, but he often introduced little leaf ornaments between the sentences in

order to fill up a gap which would otherwise have made a white patch by coming immediately above or below another such space. And in reprinting his own works, whenever he found a line that justified awkwardly, he altered the wording solely for the sake of making it look well in print.

When a proof has been sent me with two or three lines so widely spaced as to make a grey band across the page, I have often re-written the passage so as to fill up the lines better; but I am sorry to say that my object has generally been so little understood that the compositor has spoilt all the rest of the paragraph instead of mending his former bad work. Some of the American imitators of William Morris have actually introduced copies of his leaf ornaments between their sentences, and then made a wide space after the ornament as if to prove how little they understood what he used it for.

The way in which the author spoils the printer's work is now clear. The author always makes his purely literary corrections on the proof. Consequently, though the printer take pains to set his page so that it is as even in colour as a column of

the Mazarin Bible, the author comes and knocks out a word here and wedges in a sentence there; so that the printer finds all his trouble wasted and his work disfigured. Under such circumstances he naturally grows accustomed to disregard the beautiful evenness of his page, and to justify in the cheapest, shortest and handiest way. It is therefore only in the reprinting of the classic authors, where nothing but literals are corrected, that the printer can fairly be expected to produce work of mediaeval or Morrisian excellence. And even in such editions we very rarely get it, because compositors shift from one job to another, and lose their conscientiousness on this point. A good artist-compositor should never be allowed to touch the work of a living author.

Next to evenness and richness of colour in the block of letterpress, the most important point in a printed page is margining. And here the printer is very apt to go wrong. Every printer can understand regularity: few have studied good looks except in living creatures. Consequently they aim at equal margins; and even when they have learnt that an upper margin

must be less than a lower one if it is not to look more, they do not always see that it looks well only when it looks less. The mediaeval manuscript or early printed book, with its very narrow margin at the top and very broad margin at the bottom of the page, with its outer margins broad and its inner ones contracted, so that when the book lies open the two pages seem to make but a single block of letterpress in a single frame, instead of two side by side, has never been improved upon and probably never will be. But I find it almost impossible to persuade a modern printer to make his top margin small enough; and when I at last succeed, he measures it from the running title instead of from the top line of the page. I saw a book the other day, excellently printed in old-faced type, set solid, on a fine light, clean white crusty paper; yet the page was quite spoiled by an exaggerated top margin, like a masher's collar, and by that abomination of desolation, a rule. The only thing that never looks right is a rule. There is not in existence a page with a rule on it that cannot be instantly and obviously improved by taking the rule out. Even dashes, cher-



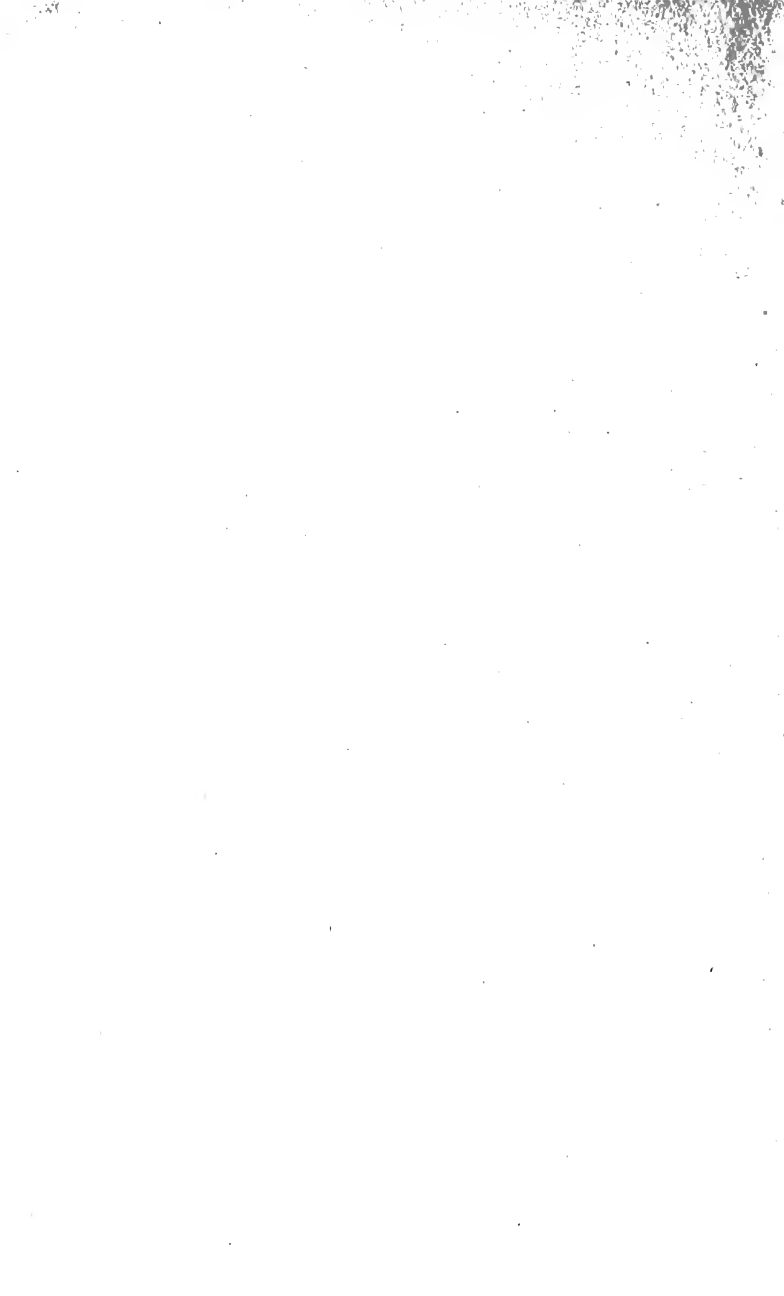
ished as they are by authors who cannot punctuate, spoil a page. They are generally merely ignorant substitutes for colons.

Of course, printers who want to turn out fine work have constantly to face the difficulty that the average customer, unfortunately including the average author, dislikes it. It is quite a mistake to think that he is merely insensible to the beauty of a finely-designed and well-printed page: he positively hates it. He likes as much glossy white paper and as little black as possible. He likes regularity. When he hangs up a print in his drawing-room, he has it framed with several inches of white mount all around it. He provides his own person with white margin in the shape of huge collar and cuffs, starched and ironed. Naturally, he likes leads in his books and broad and equal margins. He likes rules because they are straight. He even tells you that solid set type hurts the eyes, and accuses you of paradox when you tell him that it is the glare of the leaded space and the smallness of the leaded type that really make work for the oculist. He will buy a so-called art book, printed on paper that will turn into mud if a drop of water falls

on it, and send it to Mr. Douglas Cockerell or Mr. Cobden Sanderson to be bound as if it were a treasure for which national libraries might compete; and if you offered him his choice of a Kelmscott Press book and a Leadenhall Press one, he would reject William Morris and accept Andrew Tuer, whose taste he would honestly believe superior to Jenson's.

Every first-rate printing house should have a masterpiece of plain printing: not necessarily a rare book, but a well-printed one. With this should be kept a thoroughly vile specimen of a modern fashionable art book. Every author should be shown these two, and asked which he prefers. If he chooses the bad one, the printer should thereupon tell him that the book he dislikes is worth as many pounds as the other is worth sixpences, and this will so put him out of countenance that he will not presume to give any instructions or meddle in the printing of his own work. If he chooses rightly, the printer may safely hail him as worthy to be consulted in the important matter of making a book.

For—and this is the moral of what I have been saying—well-printed books are just





as scarce as well-written ones; and every author should remember that the most costly books in the world derive their value from the craft of the printer, and not from the genius of the author. I have seen a bestiary, or mediaeval natural history, the worthless compilation of a childish liar, purchased for £800 in a city where the works of Shakespeare sell for tenpence halfpenny. And if you want to buy a Shakespeare for £60, you must bid for one of the volumes of his sonnets which Morris printed at the Kelmscott Press.

WE JUDGE OURSELVES
BY WHAT WE FEEL
CAPABLE OF DOING,
BUT OTHERS JUDGE
US BY WHAT WE HAVE AL-
READY DONE. ∴ *LONGFELLOW*

Among the specimens received during the past month, a package from Horace Carr, Cleveland, easily takes precedence. Excellent stock, largely hand-made, good inks, good presswork and an unusually careful regard for type arrangement and color, all combine to make this work a delight to the lover of the best in printing. There is nothing to criticize in any of it.—Inland Printer.

Mr. Carr is one of the best typographers in the United States. He knows type faces, and when he uses decoration it is the kind that blends with the spirit of the printed page. When he selects inks and papers, they seem to be the only kind that could have been selected.—American Printer.



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